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ABSTRACT

Three metropolitan and five rural counties in Washington State were studied to determine relationships between budget change decisions--particularly expenditure decreases--and public service consequences. Demographic, economic, social, and budget data for 1979-1982 from census sources, state and county agency reports, and 214 questionnaire responses from public services officials were used. Annual expenditures were found to have increased for most agencies throughout the period. Judicial, law enforcement, and correctional units received consistent increases; environmental protection, parks, and recreation tended to be cut drastically. General government, social/health services, physical services, education, planning, and community development remained relatively stable. State-mandated requirements and priorities of local officials were among the major factors in budget allocations. In general, public officials perceived that little had been lost in service quality or quantity, although maintenance of plant, equipment, and capital outlays were thought to have suffered seriously. While no definitive conclusions could be drawn from the study, improvements in staff efficiency and creativity and greater cooperation among county departments, along with a worsened staff client ratio and less ability for long-range planning were some noted outcomes. Variables such as urbanness, socioeconomic conditions, expenditure changes, and outcomes perceptions showed less intercorrelation than anticipated. Tables provide county and budget data, categories and comparisons of outcome variables, and correlation matrices of antecedent, intervening, and outcome factors. (LFL)

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CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC SERVICE BUDGET CONSTRAINTS: THE PERSPECTIVE OF COUNTY OFFICIALS

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CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC SERVICE BUDGET CONSTRAINTS
THE PERSPECTIVE OF COUNTY OFFICIALS[1]

ABSTRACT

Eight counties in the State of Washington served as the focus for a study of issues associated with budget changes. Secondary data were collected from published sources and a mail survey in 1984 of elected and appointed officials provided primary data. The secondary data enabled us to trace changes in expenditure patterns for specific services from 1979 through 1984.

Annual expenditure increases were the norm for most services throughout the period, except for the deep recession years, 1981-1982, and again in 1984. Judicial, law enforcement, and correctional units received consistent increases, in part because of state mandates. Environmental protection, parks, and recreation tended to be cut rather drastically. General government, social and health services, physical services (roads, bridges, etc.), education, planning and community development remained relatively stable.

Public officials credit state-mandated requirements for improvement in correctional and law enforcement services as a major factor in budget

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[1] Revision of a presentation to the annual meetings of the Rural Sociological Society, Blacksburg, Virginia, August, 1985. William R. Lassey is a rural sociologist and professor of sociology; Lorna M. Butler is an extension anthropologist; and Vicki Kullberg is a research associate, at Washington State University. Support for this research was provided through the Agricultural Research Center and Cooperative Extension, Washington State University. We wish to acknowledge the very helpful comments and suggestions from James Barron, Annabel Cook, Ron Faas, and Robert Howell. Glenda Blankenship and Jeong-Lim Nam assisted with the analysis. Although we assume final responsibility, the product is much improved because of these very helpful contributions. Scientific paper #7159, Agricultural Research Center, Washington State University. The research is affiliated with a national project (NE-151), "Fiscal Austerity and its Consequences in Local Governments."

priorities. However, priorities of local officials are also a major factor. Cutbacks in federal and state funds for environmental protection is part of the basis for county cutbacks, but again, local priorities appear to support such actions.

Despite budget decreases in some service categories, public officials perceived generally that little had been lost in service quality or quantity, although maintenance of plant, equipment, and capital outlays were thought to have suffered rather seriously.

CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC SERVICE BUDGET CONSTRAINTS: THE PERSPECTIVE OF COUNTY OFFICIALS

Introduction

The primary purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between budget change decisions (particularly expenditure decreases) and public service consequences. The criteria for budget decisions are identified, as are the major local and outside influences on decisions. The study is partially longitudinal; selected secondary data on budget change were collected for the period beginning in 1979 and extending through 1984.

Comparisons are made between urban settings represented by three metropolitan counties, and five more rural, nonmetropolitan counties. Major metropolitan areas (such as Seattle, Spokane, or Tacoma) are not included. The range in size, population, and other selected characteristics is displayed in Table 1.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The data include "subjective" indicators of public service provision, as well as "objective" expenditure changes. This is achieved by measurement of outcomes as perceived by heads of public service organizations.[2]

Issues in Rural Public Service Provision

Among the important functions of local governments in uncertain financial times is the amelioration of potentially adverse consequences of sudden changes in the socioeconomic viability of local jurisdictions (Camboni and Napier, 1985). This has become a particularly relevant issue since the austerity period beginning in 1981, when a major recession triggered revenue cutbacks at local, state and federal levels.

Rural government jurisdictions throughout the nation are, accordingly, undergoing major public service adjustments. In some locations rapid population influx or outflow leads to major increases or decreases in service demands. State cutbacks in revenue generating authority and cutbacks in state and federal revenue sharing have each had dramatic impacts. Increasing demands for specific types of services, often mandated by state or federal legislation, create near crisis conditions in states such as Washington, where support of new state mandated correctional facilities absorbs a substantial proportion of local funding (Rawlins and Narver, 1984).

Attempts to stem spending increases at federal and state levels has led to increased difficulty in sustaining traditional local public service activities, such as public safety. The situation is particularly aggravated when funds are cut for programs that have, until recently, been heavily supported by state and federal funds (public health, social services, environmental protection, planning and community development, for example). The capacity of rural governments to effectively generate the revenue and manage the additional responsibilities remains uncertain (Reid, 1984).

There is presently little data to document the impacts of budget change across a range of rural jurisdictions. The criteria for making public service adjustments are not clearly articulated. Little evidence exists to indicate whether decisions are based primarily upon political expediency, cost-effectiveness criteria, equity considerations, formalized planning and community development or other factors (Christenson, 1982). The lack of data may be of particular significance in a national political environment dominated by a focus on cutbacks in federal programs which have been major sources of funding for local public services (Bureau of the Census, 1984).

Several basic questions need better answers: To what degree are budget changes causing major cutbacks in rural public services? What criteria have been used, and what are the most influential factors, in decisions about differentially supporting (or failing to support) various services? How are local adjustments affected by federal and state mandates? Have planning and community development affected outcomes? Have public services seriously deteriorated in their ability to meet critical human needs or protect the biophysical environment? How have rural and more urban locations been differentially affected?

ANTECEDENT CONDITIONS

Christenson and Taylor (1982) used statewide data from North Carolina counties to explore the relationship between expenditures, which they explicitly define as inputs, and both objective and subjective output measures. The findings indicate that selected antecedent conditions are related to objective and subjective measures of service output, but do not relate significantly to expenditures. Further, expenditures do not show a significant relationship with either objective or subjective output measures. Among the antecedent factors, population density (urbanness) is consistently the strongest predictor of perceived (subjective) service quality.

Such studies have helped to identify selected consequences of budget changes, and serve to clarify the importance of distinguishing between "expenditures" as a measure of inputs (rather than services delivered) and "perceptions of service adequacy" as a measure of what is occurring from the the viewpoint of people at the local level.

Economic and Social Issues

Local government budgeting problems have been exacerbated by the existence of mandates from state and federal levels to "upgrade" service structures at the local level (such as detention facilities). The external mandates are particularly problematic in rural jurisdictions with little local ability to generate the needed revenues (Green and Reid, 1981). Studies of expenditure patterns for public services consistently indicate lower per capita service provision in the more rural counties (Rogers, 1982), suggesting that budgeting problems may currently be more severe than in urban locations.

Furthermore, a number of interacting forces complicate adequate public service funding, in addition to limitations resulting from economic recession. These include, for example, inflation, unemployment in the more depressed jurisdictions, taxpayer resistance to higher taxes, and reduction of intergovernmental transfer payments such as revenue sharing (Sullivan et al., 1981). Rural jurisdictions are, as a consequence, exploring alternatives for provision of public services as they attempt to adequately respond under conditions of both increased costs and cutbacks in revenue sources (Camboni and Napier, 1985).

Fiscal Limitations and Public Service Priorities

Danziger and Ring (1982) report that Proposition 13 in California has led to spending priorities based on a "hierarchy of community needs." This hierarchy appears to have evolved in the following priority order: public safety services, public works, administrative services, human resources, and leisure services. Health services, libraries, parks, recreation, and cultural activities were cut most severely, but an erosion of the quality and quantity of virtually all human services was detected.

Wolman and Davis (1980) studied local government response to fiscal pressure in three counties of New York and in a nationwide sample of cities. The general response patterns included, in their parlance: (1) buying-time, (2) increasing intergovernmental revenues, (3) increasing own-source revenues, (4) expenditure reduction, and (5) cutting spending and services. Locally funded programs were much more susceptible to reduction than activities fully or partially funded by state or federal sources. The programs most likely to be cut heavily included: parks, recreation, culture, public works, and general government. Public safety activities tended to be insulated from cuts as were programs "mandated" by federal or state government.

EXPECTED RELATIONSHIPS

A general ordering of antecedent, intervening, and outcome variables are listed in Table 2. The antecedent factors are derived from secondary data, and are expected to impact the intervening and outcome factors derived from the survey of county public officials.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Officials in the more urban counties, with better economic and social conditions, are expected to indicate a lower incidence of budget cutbacks and more optimistic outcomes of budget change. These counties should have invested more in planning and development programs, which should have a positive effect on budgets and outcomes.

Further, the officials of the more rural counties should report budget cutbacks in a higher proportion of organizations, and should be less optimistic than their more urban counterparts with respect to outcomes. Lower

levels of economic and social conditions will prevail, allowing for more limited investment in planning and development. The rural counties are expected to be relatively disadvantaged as compared to the more urban counties.

PROCEDURES

Demographic, economic and social information was obtained from census sources and reports by state agencies. Budget and expenditure information for 1979 through 1982 was taken from county reports to the state auditor (1983 and 1984 data had not yet been compiled); survey respondents were also asked to estimate budget changes for each of the years from 1979 through 1984.

The survey data was generated from mailed questionnaires returned by 214 public service officials in the eight counties (an 84% return rate). The officials included elected county office holders (33%), politically appointed heads of county units (25%), and competitively selected administrators (37%). Other officials were also included if they headed programs providing county-wide services (5%).

Counties were systematically selected according to the following criteria, each of which was considered important to "representativeness" in the State, while contributing to variability on the antecedent, intervening and outcome variables:

(1) 1984 population, which ranged from 202,000 to 3,800;

(2) A range in metropolitan/nonmetropolitan census designation status;

(3) Per capita assessed property valuation and per capita income, as measures of general economic conditions;

(4) Unemployment and poverty rates, as measures of social conditions;

(5) Geographical dispersion in the state.

Random selection of counties would have been a better procedure from a statistical standpoint. However, some counties were less willing to participate in the study, as compared to the selected counties. Since the research was a cooperative endeavor between "research" and "extension" faculty, with an intent to develop follow-up educational programs tailored to specific counties, it was deemed crucial to select counties where educational potential was viable.

The characteristics of the selected counties are compared with other Washington counties in Table 3. Although there are differences between the selected counties and state means in population (with the four major metropolitan counties excluded), other comparisons in the table suggest basic similarity between the study counties and other counties. This does not allow treatment of the data as though probability sampling were used, but confidence in the potential generalizability of the results is somewhat enhanced.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Public officials within each of the selected counties were identified through the use of three primary sources: (1) the official statewide directory of county officials, published by the Washington State Association of Counties; (2) county organization sections of local telephone directories; and (3) lists of officials not discovered through the first two sources but who were known by county extension staff to head public service programs. This led to a comprehensive mailing list of all individuals with official responsibility for one or more public service activities, whether or not they were directly employed by a unit of county government.

We were interested in the full range of county-wide public services--except for K through 12 education (which is not financed or administered

through counties in Washington). Many public services offered by smaller jurisdictions and special districts are not included in this analysis. We chose to focus on the county as the general unit of government most responsible for major services to rural areas.

The outcome measures are "subjective" responses of county officials to questionnaire items. The admonition of Jick and Murray (1982) suggests why this seems appropriate: "it is the way the organization decisionmakers perceive the reasons for being cut which shapes their orientation to internal or external responses." That is, the behavior of public officials is structured by their "perceptions of the situation" rather than strictly by "objective" conditions.

Selected Respondent and County Characteristics

Although the level of education is relatively high for respondents as a group, the competitively selected officials are group is the best educated. Seventy-seven percent have college degrees or graduate training, compared to 69% of appointed officials and 57% of elected officials. However, 23% of the elected officials have degrees equivalent to the doctorate, which is higher than in the other categories.

Elected officials tend to be older than their appointed or competitively selected counterparts. Fifty-four percent are 46 or older, compared to 34% of appointed and 32% of the competitively selected group.

The majority of elected officials (57%) and appointed officials (52%) earn more than $30,000 annually; 45% of the competitively selected category earn $30,000 plus. Only 16% receive salaries of less than $20,000 per year.

The 1984 county populations ranged from 202,000 to 3,800 (Table 1). Three counties are classified as metro, while five are nonmetro (by U.S.

Census definition). Per capita incomes in 1981 ranged from 7,618 to 14,540, and per capita assessed valuation in 1983 ranged from 21,852 to 46,609 (Table 3). Unemployment rates in 1983 ranged from 5.3% to 16.5%. Poverty levels ranged from 6.7% to 18.6%. Square mile area ranged from 4,268 to 261.

FINDINGS

Budget Change

Each county official estimated annual budget changes for their organization beginning in 1979 and extending through 1984. The incidence of budget cutbacks was generally small in the first two years (1979-1980), but was more extensive in the metropolitan (11%) and larger nonmetro (9%) than in the smaller counties (3%). Increases were the norm for most organizations in all counties.

The incidence of reported cutbacks grew steadily through 1984 in metro and small nonmetro counties, reaching 23% of all organizations in metro and 27% in smaller nonmetro counties. The pattern in the larger nonmetro counties was strikingly different, affecting only 6-8% of the organizations in 1981, 1982, and 1984, although 26% were cut in 1983. The pattern of stability in these larger nonmetro counties is difficult to explain on the basis of the antecedent conditions displayed in Table 1. More resources appeared to be available for either holding the line or increasing budgets, but the source of these resources is not clear based on available secondary data.

Officials in the smaller nonmetro counties experienced a pattern of fewer organizational budget increases than the larger counties, beginning in 1981 (49% versus 67-73%) and continuing through 1984 (27% versus 36-45%). They were clearly feeling a much greater squeeze on resources than the larger counties.

Despite variations by county size, the shift from a situation of consistent budget increases for most public services in 1979, to a decidedly higher incidence of decreases in the latter part of the six-year period, is clear across all counties. Greater austerity is evident.

Budget Allocation Differences by Service Type

The diversity in the pattern of budget change among seven organizational service types is indicated in Table 4.[3] Judicial, law enforcement, and corrections experienced the fewest cutbacks (10%). Natural resources, pollution control, and other environmental activities experienced the greatest cuts (45% had decreases). More organizations received increases than decreases overall except "planning/development" and "environmental/natural resources." Social, educational, health and physical service organizations were in the middle range for increases and decreases.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Expenditure Priorities

Current budget allocation to each service in a single year is one indicator of priority. Projected priorities for future years is a second kind of indicator. Respondents prioritized programs as follows in terms of future funding:

Law enforcement	28% of officials
Judicial system	16
Education (extension programs)	9
Finance and administration	7
Detention and corrections	6
Welfare and child support	5
Drug abuse and alcoholism	5
Public health	4
Planning	4
Housing and community development	4
Services for the elderly	4

Mental health	3
Juvenile services	3
Transportation	3
Parks and recreation	2
Natural resources	2
Pollution control	2

These priorities are roughly in the order of the budget increases or decreases discussed earlier, although the categories are not entirely comparable. The high priority of law enforcement, judicial activities and corrections is obviously supported by the incidence of budget increases. Education appears to have a considerably higher priority than is evident in budget allocations. Physical services such as transportation appear to have a lower priority than actual budgets would indicate. Social services generally fall in the middle priorities, while natural resources and pollution control are at the bottom of both priorities and budgets.

Outcomes: Effects of Budget Changes on Operations and Services

Slightly more than half of the officials (51%) concluded that the quality of services had improved during 1983-84, despite budget limitations. Only 10% were inclined to think quality had declined (Table 5). More specifically, 32% felt the quantity of services had increased and only 15% detected a decrease. One-third thought morale had improved, while 21% thought it was worse. Thirty-eight percent indicated client contacts had increased, while 13% thought there had been a decrease.

Possibly of greatest interest: 51% felt that staff efficiency and creativity had improved, while only 9% perceived deterioration. Similarly, 47% detected greater cooperation with other departments and organizations in the county, while only 6% perceived decline. Thirty-four percent thought public support

for their organization had increased, while only 4% noted less support. Overall, it seems clear that county public officials feel organizational productivity is greater, despite fiscal austerity.

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

However, the findings in this regard are not all optimistic. One-third thought the backlog of work was worse, while only 13% detected improvement. Fifty-two percent indicated the amount of paperwork was greater, while only 11% thought it was less. Ability to respond to special requests was considered worse by 35% and better by 30%. The impact of staff cuts is widely felt; 37% note the staff/client ratio is worse, while only 16% think it is better. Similarly, ability to work on long-range planning is thought to be worse by 30% of the officials, while only 24% indicated improvement.

Alternatives to Public Service Cutbacks

Measures taken to adjust to revenue shortages help explain the program consequences. The following actions were reported to be in most widespread use:

Use of part-time employees	16% of officials
Deferred maintenance or delayed capital outlays	16
User fees or charges for services	15
Centralization of services	13
Use of Citizen volunteers	11
Reduction of operations or services	10
Sharing employees with other departments or organizations	9

User fees and the use of part-time employees were judged to be the most satisfactory, while deferred maintenance or delayed capital outlays, and reduction of services, were the least preferred. However, substantial variation

among organizations and between counties was evident in application of these alternatives.

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG ANTECEDENT, INTERVENING AND OUTCOME FACTORS

Intercorrelations among antecedent, intervening and outcome variables--urbanness, economic conditions, social conditions, investment in planning and economic development, expenditure changes and outcome perceptions--are displayed in Table 6. The correlations among urbanness indicators (population size, density, and nonmetro census classification) were relatively strong (.49 to .92), suggesting each measure is tapping the same general factor.

Similarly, the two economic condition measures (per capita assessed valuation and per capita income) were strongly interrelated (.75). Social condition measures (educational level, unemployment level, and poverty level) are somewhat less consistently correlated (-.40 between education and poverty; -.66 between education and unemployment; and .80 between poverty and unemployment), but nonetheless the measures appear to be tapping the same general factor.

TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

Scales were constructed among interrelated items to provide greater variation and reliability in multivariate analysis. The "urbanness" scale, for example, combines county population size (with values 1 to 8), county population density (with values 1 to 8) and location on a three-value non-metro-to-metro continuum. The scale has a potential value ranging from 3 to 19 (Alpha Reliability Coefficient = .87).

The "economic condition" scale combines county per capita income and county per capita assessed valuation, each with a value ranging from 1 to 8, or a scale value ranging from 2 to 16 (Reliability coefficient = .67). The "social condition" scale consists of three variables: proportion of the county population with a high school education; January, 1984 unemployment rate; and proportion of the county population below the poverty level. Each of the contributing variables range from 1 to 8, adjusted in direction of positive social condition, for a total potential scale value from 3 to 24 (Reliability Coefficient = .85).

The outcome items included Likert-type questions inquiring about "whether or not the effectiveness of the organization had changed," "how the organization represented by the respondent had fared compared to other organizations," and "whether or not the quality of services had changed."

The three scales (also based on Likert-type items) were constructed to measure (1) the perceived impact on staff (efficiency and creativity, morale, and ability to do long-range planning), (2) impact on organizational clients (ability to respond to new needs, number of clients contacted, and ability to respond to special requests), and (3) cutback effects on facility maintenance and capital outlays. Each scale consisted of simply adding the score for each individual item to other item scores. If the respondent chose "worse" (than before budget changes) to all three items in the "impact on staff" scale, the score would equal "3"; if the response was "better" to each item, the scale score would equal "9." (Coefficients of reproduceability ranged from .88 for the "impact on client scale to .96 for the "effects on operations and services" scale. Coefficients of scaleability for the scales ranged from .63 to .86, respectively.)

Urbanness, the economic condition scale, the social condition scale, planning and development "investment," and expenditure change were correlated with three single item outcome measures and three outcome scales.

Correlations

The "urbanness" and "economic condition" scales are unrelated (Table 6), but there is a modest relationship between urbanness and "social condition" (.27). The economic and social scales are rather strongly related (.58). Reference to Tables 1 and 3 suggests part of the explanation. The mid-sized counties tend to have higher per capita incomes and assessed valuations than either the larger or smaller counties. Similarly poverty levels are lower in these counties. Unemployment rates are not systematically related to county size. Thus, the economic and social factors are somewhat interrelated, but neither are closely related to urbanness.

The rather substantial correlation between "urbanness" and "planning and development expenditures" (.90), and lower but significant relationships with "economic condition" (.27) and "social condition" (.33) scales is noteworthy. Apparently population size and density are central factors associated with systematic planning and community development, while economic and social factors play a lessor role. This would seem to put rural counties at a certain disadvantage.

There is little relationship between antecedent variables and "perceived public service outcomes," although economic condition is somewhat related to organizational effectiveness (.25) and effects on clients (.14).

Budget change is clearly the major factor affecting outcomes (.17 to .36), with "fairness of treatment" the most closely related to budget increase.

Outcome perceptions are interrelated, particularly "quality of services," "impact on staff" and "impact on clients" (.58 to .63).

Regression Analysis

The correlation results are generally reinforced by regression analysis (Table 7). Budget increase is the most consistent predictor of variance accounted for (R^2). The economic condition scale contributes most to organizational effectiveness (.27). Urbanness (.19) and budget increase (.35) contribute to fairness of treatment, which has the largest (if modest) R^2 (.14). Urbanness (.18), lower planning and development expenditures (-.22), and budget increase (.21) contribute to impacts on staff. Economic condition (.16) and budget increase (.20) contribute to impact on clients.

DISCUSSION

Several basic questions in need of "answers" were posed earlier. The findings certainly do not provide definitive solutions. However, tentative conclusions can be drawn.

1. To what degree are budget changes causing major cutbacks in rural public services? We find little evidence of "perceived" negative effects, except with respect to maintenance and capital outlays for plant and equipment. Environmental programs as well as parks and recreation received the greatest reduction in budget support. More than half of the county officials feel staff productivity has actually increased and citizens are being better served than formerly.

2. What criteria have been used, and what are the most influential factors, in decisions about differentially supporting various services? Antecedent conditions, such as ruralness of the county, economic condition,

and social condition, show little effect on perceptions by county officials of service outcomes.

The criteria used for allocation of resources appear to be based primarily on the priorities of county officials. Among the officials, county commissioners have greatest influence on allocation of funds, while organizational staff have greatest influence on specific program priorities within agencies. A very strong external influence is exerted through mandates issues by state and federal programs which provide some portion of the funding for county services.

3. How are local budget adjustments affected by federal and state mandates? Mandated programs appear rather consistently to get highest priority in local fund allocations. This is illustrated most forcefully in Washington by the state requirement for upgraded correctional facilities--which has essentially "forced" county governments to allocate greater local resources to support the new facilities. This has tended in some counties to "crowd out" expenditures for other high priority services (Rawlins and Narver, 1984).

4. Have planning and development programs affected outcomes? Positive effects may have occurred in the more urban counties which have generally expended more funds for this purpose. Perceptions of outcome are not statistically affected by investments in planning and development programs.

5. Have public services seriously deteriorated? Environmental protection and natural resource conservation programs are perceived to have deteriorated. Whether this translates into actual decline cannot be determined by the survey data. However, secondary information from several of the counties suggests that parks and recreation have clearly suffered, and the

priority given to protection of air, water, and land has gone down, in part because of decreased federal and state funds (Rawlins and Narver, 1984).

Other services are perceived to have suffered somewhat, but, overall, officials feel they have been able to maintain or increase the number and quality of services--although there is less ability to respond to special requests and less time for long-range program planning.

6. Have rural and urban counties been differentially affected? The more urban counties have generally done better at maintaining budgets and programs. However, officials in the larger (and growing) nonmetropolitan counties perceive their organizations to have done better than in metropolitan counties. This analysis suggests that the rural-to-urban continuum is not linear nor particularly explanatory with this group of counties, because of widely differing economic, social, and political characteristics.

Actual outcomes through 1984 could not readily be measured with existing data. This would have required field studies of service delivery and/or surveys of citizen judgments about service provision. Such data must await the conduct of additional research.

These findings appear to be somewhat contradictory to the Christenson and Taylor (1982) research using statewide North Carolina data. They found that expenditures did not show a significant relationship with output measures, while antecedent variables, such as ruralness, were consistent predictors of perceived service quality. However, the two sets of data are not altogether comparable, since their conclusions were based on a statewide population (rather than public official) survey and secondary data from all counties in the state.

The great diversity of economic and social conditions in both rural and urban counties in Washington State appears to make urbanness a relatively

poor predictor of changes in service provision changes--although there is certainly evidence of a narrower range of service availability in the more rural counties, as Rogers (1982) found nationally.

The public service priorities identified in California (Danziger and Ring, 1982) are similar to the findings here. However, from the viewpoint of county officials, there has not been the same kind of erosion of quality and quantity that was reported to be occurring in California a few years earlier. It is important to note, again, that the data used in each state are not entirely comparable.

The Wolman and Davis (1980) categorization of response patterns to budget cutbacks is generally comparable in Washington. County officials reported very close to the same types of response choices: buying-time, attempting to increase intergovernmental revenues, raising more funds through local means, expenditure reductions, and service reductions. The programs susceptible to cutbacks in New York were comparable to those in Washington, while public safety and mandated services tended to be "insulated" in both states.

In sum, the data from Washington show results generally comparable to findings from earlier studies in California and New York, but are possibly at variance with results from North Carolina. The expected relationships between antecedent conditions, budget changes, and perceived outcomes were not as predicted. Urbanness, economic conditions, and social conditions selectively helped predict perceived service outcomes, although budget change was the most consistent predictive factor.

FOOTNOTES

2. See Christenson and Taylor, 1982, for a helpful discussion of relationships between subjective and objective outcome measures.

3. Categories of Public Service

Judicial/Corrections/Law Enforcement: District Court, Sheriff's Department, Prosecutor's Office, Superior Court, Adult Probation, Community Corrections, Juvenile Court and Services, Offender Services, Assigned Counsel, Juvenile Probation, Public Defender's Office, Judicial, Work-Training Release, Family Court, Evergreen Legal Services.

General Government: County Commissioners, Assessor, Personnel, Data Processing, Clerk, Auditor, Councils of Government, Finance/ Treasurer.

Physical Services: Public Works, Physical Plant, Fire Department, Central Services, Emergency Services, Building and Land Department, Engineering and Maintenance.

Planning and Development: Regional Planning, Port District, County Planning, Community Development.

Environmental: Pollution Control, Conservation District, Weed Control.

Health and Medical: Mosquito Control, Family Planning, Home Health Care, Development Disability Services, Medical Examiner, Alcoholism Programs, Mental Health, County Health, Hospitals, Coroner.

Social and Educational: Parks and Recreation, Job Services, Senior Nutrition, Nursing Homes, Housing Programs, Multiservice Center, Nutrition, Headstart, Library, Museum, County Fair, Community Colleges.

Table 1. Selected Characteristics of the Research Counties

Name and Class	Estimated 1984 Population*	1980 Proportion of Population with High School Education, 25 and Older	1984 Unemployment Rates**	1981 Per Capita Income	1983 Per Capita Assessed Valuation	1981 % Below Poverty Level	Sq. Mi. Area
Washington	4,328,100		8.4				
(1)							
Clark	201,700	75.7	7.0	10,468	29,833	7.1	627
Yakima	180,000	62.4	10.1(1)	9,484	22,967	11.8	4,268
(2)							
Whatcom	113,700	76.6	9.8(1)	9,449	35,595	8.6	2,126
Cowlitz	79,900	71.2	11.0	10,780	38,553	8.2	1,144
(3)							
Grays Harbor	65,100	67.2	13.7	11,532	32,010	8.0	1,910
(6)							
Lincoln	9,800	76.5	5.5	14,540	46,409	6.7	2,306
(7)							
Ferry	6,100	72.4	12.2	7,618	22,159	18.6	2,202
(8)							
Wahkiakum	3,800	63.8	10.7	9,508	21,852	10.8	261

* Cook, Annabel Kirschner, 1984. Census Notes. Number 16. Pullman, WA: Washington State University, Department of Rural Sociology.

** September, 1984, Preliminary rates, not seasonally adjusted.

(1) SMSA rate is given.

Table 2. Categories of Variables Related to Public Service Outcomes

Antecedent Factors	Intervening Factor	Outcome Factors
Ruralness of county - Rank of eight counties population - Population density - Metro-nonmetro status Economic conditions - Per capita assessed valuation - Per capita income Social conditions - Education beyond high school - Unemployment - Poverty level Planning and economic development - Budgets	Expenditure cutbacks or increases	Perceptions of effectiveness and efficiency of services - Improved services - Proportionate allocations to all services - Proportion of cutbacks for each type of service - Fairness of budget allocations Impacts of cutbacks - Deferred maintenance - Reduction of services

Adapted from Jones and Murdock, 1978.

Table 3. Comparisons of Means on Selected Antecedent Variables for Study Counties and Other Counties in Washington (Excluding Four Major Metropolitan Counties)

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Population (1983)				
Other Counties	40,733	38,662	2,400	161,600
Survey Counties	81,700	76,771	3,700	200,000
Median Age (1983)				
Other Counties	31	3.2	23.9	36.8
Survey Counties	30	2.5	27.3	35.4
Percentage of High School Graduates (1980)				
Other Counties	74	5.8	65.7	88.0
Survey Counties	71	5.8	62.1	76.8
Per Capita Income (1981)				
Other Counties	10,336	1,868	6,989	15,630
Survey Counties	10,422	2,030	7,618	14,540
Per Capita Assessed Property Valuation (1983)				
Other Counties	35,081	17,028	17,187	111,871
Survey Counties	31,197	8,866	21,852	46,609
Unemployment Rate (1983)				
Other Counties	13	4.0	4.0	20.5
Survey Counties	12	3.8	5.3	16.5
Percentage of Population Below Poverty Level (1980)				
Other Counties	8.9	1.9	5.6	12.6
Survey Counties	10.0	3.9	6.7	18.6

Table 4. Budget Changes by Type of County Organization for 1984 (Based on 1983 Decisions)*
(Percentages; Total N = 214)

Category	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	
	Judicial/Law Enforcement/ Corrections	General Govt.	Health and Medical	Physical Services	Social & Educ.	Planning & Dev.	Environ-mental	TOTAL
Decreased	10%	21%	22%	25%	29%	38%	45%	23%
Remain the Same	40	32	48	40	39	23	55	38
Increased	50	47	30	35	32	38	0	39
TOTAL % OF RESPONDENTS	24	27	12	10	16	7	6	100

* See Footnote 3.

Table 5. Effects of Budget Changes on Organizations

Effects	Response Categories[a]	
	Better	Worse
Quality of Services	51%	10%
Number of Services	33	15
Backlog in Work	13	34
Response to New Needs	30	35
Staff Morale	33	21
Number of Clients Contacted	38	12
Response to Special Requests	30	35
Staff/Client Ratio	16	37
Backup in Client Referral	9	13
Long-Range Planning	24	31
Staff Efficiency and Creativity	51	9
Cooperation	47	6
Public Support	33	4

[a]The percentages do not total to 100%; the difference is attributable to the "no change" response.

Table 6. Correlation Matrix of Antecedent, Intervening and Outcome Factors

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Antecedent Factors												
(1) Urbanness Scale											12.6	4.8
(2) Economic Scale	.06										8.9	3.6
(3) Social Scale	.27*	.58*									13.8	5.7
(4) Planning and Development Expenditures 1981	.90*	.27*	.33*								28.8	15.8
Intervening Factor												
(5) 1984 Budget Change	.08	.07	.03	.04							3.11	.99
Outcome Factors (Perceptions)												
(6) Effects on Organizational Effectiveness	.04	.25*	.10	.10	.16*						3.33	.77
(7) Fairness of Treatment in Budgeting	.08	.03	-.03	.05	.36*	.32*					3.22	.93
(8) Quality of Services Provided	.02	.07	.08	.03	.17*	.26*	.33*				2.42	.66
(9) Impact of Cutbacks on Staff (Scale)	.02	.03	.07	-.02	.22*	.27*	.34*	.58*			6.46	1.69
(10) Impact of Cutbacks on Clients (Scale)	-.09	.14*	.06	-.06	.20*	.28*	.29*	.63*	.62*		6.19	1.92
(11) Cutback Impacts on Maintenance and Capital Outlays (Scale)	-.05	-.13	-.05	.04	-.21*	-.13*	-.23*	-.31*	-.30*	-.44*	4.47	.99

* $p \leq .05$; n = 214

Table 7. Standardized Partial Coefficients of Antecedent, Intervening and Outcome Factors

	Effects on Organizational Effectiveness	Fairness of Treatment in Budgeting	Quality of Services Provided	Impacts of Cutbacks on Staff (Scale)	Impacts of Cutbacks on Clients (Scale)	Impacts of Cutbacks on Maintenance and Capital Outlay (Scale)
Antecedent Factors						
Urbanness Scale	-.05	.19*	-.07	.18*	-.05	-.05
Economic Conditions Scale	.27*	.11	.02	.01	.16*	-.14
Social Conditions Scale	-.07	-.10	.06	.08	.00	-.03
Planning and Development Expenditures 1981	.10	-.13	.05	-.22*	-.07	.14
Intervening Factors						
1984 Budget Change	.15*	.35*	.17*	.21*	.20*	-.20*
R^2	.09	.14	.04	.06	.08	.07

* $p \leq .05$; n = 214

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